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Mother Michel and her Cat

BY

EMILIE DE LA BEDOLLIERRE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

FANNY FULLER

NEW YORK
PUBLISHED BY HURD AND HOUGHTON
Cambridge: Riverside Press
1869

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CONTENTS.

I. Telling how Mother Michel became acquainted with her cat 11
II. How the cat was installed at Madame de la Grenouillière's, and confided to Mother Michel's care 18
III. Mother Michel's good qualities, and Father Lustucru's villany, are revealed 28
IV. Mother Michel's cat displays great intelligence, and proves himself strong in adversity 88
V. Mother Michel's cat conquers his enemy 50
VI. Father Lustucru confides his odious projects to Nicholas Faribole 62
VII. Father Lustucru triumphs, and Mother Michel's cat finds himself in a grievous position 76
VIII. Mother Michel in search of her cat 88

Conclusion. All are made happy saving the guilty one.. 93

MOTHER MICHEL

AND

HER CAT.

I.

Telling how Mother Michel became acquainted with her Cat.

THERE lived in Paris, during the reign of the late King Louis XV., an old Countess, named Yolande de la Grenouillière, rich both in lands and in ready money; she not

only distributed alms to the poor of *Saint Germain l'Auxerrois*, her own parish, but also to those of other districts. Her husband, Roch Eustache Jérémie, Count de la Grenouillière, died gloriously at the battle of *Fontenoy*, on the 11th of May, 1745. The noble widow was quite inconsolable at his loss — did she not weep for him still, many times during the week? Living in almost entire seclusion, and having no children, she conceived a strange mania, which, although it detracted nothing from her real virtues, and eminent qualities, caused her much unhappiness. She had a passion for animals, but all her pets died in her arms! Her first love was a green parrot, who, having imprudently eaten parsley, perished a victim to a frightful colic. An indigestion caused by too many cracknels deprived Madame de la Grenouillière of a promising pug dog. A third favourite, an interesting monkey of the ouistity species, having broken his chain one evening, rambled through the trees in the park, and being caught in a shower, took so severe a cold in his head, that he was soon carried to his

grave. The Countess had afterwards birds of different kinds; but some flew away, while others died of the pip. Overcome by so many disasters, Madame de la Grenouillière shed bitter tears. Her friends, compassionating her melancholy, offered her squirrels, learned canaries, white mice, cockatoos—but she would accept none of them: she even refused a superb poodle dog, who played dominoes, danced the gavot, ate salad, and made Greek translations. "No, no," said she, "I wish for no more pets, the air of my house is fatal to them!" She had become a fatalist.

One day, as she was leaving church, she saw a troop of children running by, laughing and shouting joyously. When she seated herself in her carriage, she found that their merriment was caused by a poor cat, to whose tail some evil disposed person had fastened a sauce-pan. The unfortunate animal had evidently been running long, for he seemed exhausted with fatigue. Seeing him slacken his pace, his persecutors encircled him, and commenced pelting him with stones. The unhappy cat,

finding himself surrounded by enemies, bent his head, and resigned himself to his sad fate, with all the heroism of a Roman Senator. Several of the missiles had already touched him, when Madame de la Grenouillière, filled with compassion, left her carriage, traversed the crowd, and exclaimed: "I will give a louis to whoever saves that animal!"

These words produced a magical effect; they transformed the tormentors, into liberators: the cat was nearly suffocated by those, who now disputed the honour of capturing him. At last a modern Hercules seized the cat, and presented him, half dead, to the Countess.

"Thank you, my good boy," said the Countess; "here is the promised reward."

Giving him a louis d'or, fresh from the mint, she then added: "Pray relieve the poor animal from his cumbersome burden."

Whilst the Hercules obeyed, Madame de la Grenouillière examined the being whose life she had just saved. He presented the true type of a gutter cat, and his natural ugliness was increased by the accidents natural to his long and irregular style of living. His short hair was soiled with mud; his gray coat, striped with black, like that of the zebra, was barely visible, beneath the many spots which disfigured it. He was so lean, that you could almost count his bones, and so feeble that a mouse might have knocked him down; he had but one thing in his favour, it was his physiognomy.

"Heavens, how ugly he is!" exclaimed Madame de la Grenouillière, after gazing upon him.

As she entered her carriage, the cat fixed upon her his large sea-green eyes, and gave her a strange, an indefinable look, a look which was full of reproach, as well as of gratitude; a look, so expressive that the good lady was

suddenly fascinated by it; for she read in it a discourse of wondrous eloquence. It seemed to say to her: "you yielded to a generous impulse; you beheld me, feeble, suffering, and oppressed, and you took pity upon me. Now that your benevolence is satisfied, my deformity fills you with contempt! I thought that you were kind, but you are not so; you have merely the instinct of kindness. If you were really charitable, you would continue to feel an interest in me, from the very fact of my ugliness; you would think that my misfortunes were occasioned by my ill looks—and would remember, that should you leave me in the street, at the mercy of the wicked—the same cause would produce the same results. Do not flatter yourself with the thoughts of your generosity! You have done me no service, you have merely prolonged my agony. I am an outcast; every one rejects me, and I am condemned to die; let my destiny be fulfilled!"

Madame de la Grenouillière was moved unto tears; the cat appeared superhuman to her—no—he was but a cat—he seemed to her *super-*

animal! She reflected upon the mysteries of metempsychosis, and imagined that the cat, before inhabiting his present form, had been a great orator, and a good man. She said to her companion, Mother Michel, who had remained in the carriage:

"Take this cat and hold him for me!"

"What!" inquired Mother Michel; "Does Madame intend to take him home with her?"

"Certainly, so long as I live, this animal shall occupy a place at my fire-side, and at my table. If you wish to please me, let him have the same attention as myself."

"Madame shall be obeyed."

"That is what I wish. Coachman, drive home."

II.

How the cat was installed at Madame de la Grenouillière's and confided to Mother Michel's care.

MADAME DE LA GRENOUILLIÈRE resided in a magnificent house, situated at the corner of the streets, *Saint Thomas du Louvre*, and *Orties Saint Louis*. She led a very retired life, seeing scarcely any one, but her two chief servants: Madame Michel, her companion, and Mr. Lustucru, her major-domo.

As these attendants were both advanced in years, the countess called them, facetiously, Father Lustucru and Mother Michel.

The expression of Mother Michel's face was excellent, full of sunshine and candour; whilst that of Father Lustucru expressed both duplicity and dishonesty. The major-domo's wheedling manners might impose upon inexperienced persons, but a quick observer could not fail to perceive the malevolence concealed beneath his mask of pretended good nature; the large blue eyes were filled with deceit; concentrated anger quivered in the nostrils; cunning sat on the end of the pointed nose, and malice played about the corners of the mouth. This man appeared trustworthy, but his probity was merely seeming; he carefully concealed the blackness of his soul.

Lustucru detested animals; but in order to flatter the tastes of his mistress, he pretended to idolize them. When he beheld Mother Michel with the rescued cat in her arms, he said to himself: "Another pet! As if there had not already been enough!" He could not

refrain from darting a look of antipathy at the cat, but controlling himself immediately, he exclaimed with feigned admiration: "Ah, what a beautiful cat! How pretty he is! I have never seen his like!"

And he caressed him in the most perfidious manner.

"Do you really not think him ugly?" inquired Madame de la Grenouillière.

"Ugly! How can you ask such a question? He has charming eyes! Even were he hideous, Madame would have metamorphosed him, by interesting herself in his favour!"

"He did not please me at first."

"Those who displease us at first sight, often become the most dear to us;" said Father Lustucru, with a sententious air.

The cat's toilet was immediately commenced; notwithstanding the poor thing's instinctive horror of water, he submitted to the ablution with touching resignation; as though he knew that it would embellish him. After serving him with a dish of warmed up meat, which he eagerly devoured, they arranged the hours for

his meals, his daily employments, and his sleeping place. Then a name had to be chosen for him. Mother Michel and Father Lustucru proposed many suitable ones, such as *Mistigris*, *Tristapatte*, *Ratapon*, and *Rodilardus;* but the countess rejected them all. She wished a name, which might recall to her the circumstances under which she had found the cat. A learned man, whom she consulted the next day, gave her that of *Moumouth*, composed of two Hebrew words, signifying, *rescued from the sauce-pans.*

At the end of a few days Moumouth was no longer recognizable; nourishing food had rounded his form, his hair was smooth and shining, his moustache was curled like that of a swaggerer of the seventeenth century, and his eyes shone like emeralds. He was a living proof of the influence of comfort, towards the amelioration of race. He owed his good looks principally to Mother Michel, for whom he felt affection and gratitude, whilst he showed a marked aversion to Father Lustucru. He saw, indeed, but little of the major-domo; but he always refused everything offered by him, as

though he instinctively felt that he was his enemy.

Moumouth's days flowed peacefully on; everything predicted a happy future for him; but like the sword of Damocles, sorrows will ever hover over the heads of both men and cats. On the 24th of January, 1753, Moumouth was unusually sad; he scarcely noticed Madame de la Grenouillière's caresses; he ate nothing, and passed all day crouched in the chimney-corner, eyeing the fire with a mournful and dejected air. He felt the presentiment of a coming misfortune, nor did it fail to appear. In the evening a courier, sent from the château of *Gingeole* in Normandy, brought a letter to the countess, from her younger sister, in which she informed her, that she had been thrown from her carriage, and broken her leg, — that she longed to see the only relation she had in the world, and begged her to come to her without delay. Madame de la Grenouillière was too kind-hearted to hesitate for a moment.

"I shall go to-morrow," said she.

At these words, Moumouth, who was follow-

ing his mistress with his eyes, mewed with melancholy.

"Poor cat," said the lady, deeply moved, "I shall be obliged to leave you! I cannot take you with me, because my sister has the bad taste to hate animals of your species. She declares that they are treacherous. What a calumny! In her youth she one day caressed a kitten, who, touched by her marks of affection, involuntarily scratched her. Was this perfidy? No, it was tenderness of heart. Nevertheless, from that day forth, my sister has vowed eternal hatred to your race!"

Moumouth looked at his mistress, as though he would say: "Noble woman, you at least do us justice!"

After a moment of silence and reflection, the countess added: "Mother Michel, I confide my cat to you."

"We will take good care of him, Madame," said Father Lustucru.

"I beg that you will not trouble yourself about him," interrupted the countess; "you know that he cannot abide you, that your pre-

sence, alone, suffices to irritate him. Why, I know not; but you are insufferable to him."

"It is true," said Father Lustucru, with an air of contrition, "but the cat is unjust; for I love him, and he does not love me."

"My sister is unjust also; cats may possibly like her, but she does not like them: I respect her opinion, respect that of Moumouth."

After pronouncing these words with a firm voice, Madame de la Grenouillière addressed herself to her companion:

"It is to you, Mother Michel, to you alone that I confide him; if I find him safe and well when I return, I will overwhelm you with kindness. I am sixty-five years old, you are ten years younger, in all probability you will close my eyes——"

"Ah, Madame, why these sad thoughts?"

"Let me finish. I had already thought of providing you with the means of an easy existence; but, if you preserve Moumouth from harm, I will give you a pension of fifteen hundred francs."

"Ah, Madame," said Mother Michel, with a tearful voice, "it is useless, my services are disinterested. I love your cat with my whole heart, and shall always be devoted to him."

"I am convinced of it, and I shall consequently know how to recompense your zeal."

During this dialogue, Father Lustucru used every effort to contain his jealousy: "Everything for her, and nothing for me," said he to himself; "fifteen hundred francs a year—it is a fortune—and shall I allow her to enjoy it! Oh, no, she shall not have it!"

The next day, at half-past seven in the morning, four prancing horses were attached to the post-chaise which was to carry the excellent dowager to Normandy. She said once more, adieu to her favourite, and after pressing him to her heart, stepped into the carriage. Until then Moumouth had only felt a vague uneasiness; but at that moment he understood everything! He saw his benefactress about to leave him, and fearful of losing her, he made one bound and leaped beside her.

"You must remain," said Madame de la

Grenouillière, restraining her tears with difficulty.

Can you believe it? The cat wept also!

To put an end to this painful scene, Mother Michel seized the cat by the shoulders, and dragged him from the cushion of the carriage, to which he clung convulsively. The door was closed, the horses shook their heads and started at the rate of three miles an hour. Moumouth gave a last look and fainted.

Madame de la Grenouillière, waving her handkerchief from the window of the post-chaise, cried:

"Mother Michel, I confide my cat to you!"

"Be tranquil, Madame, I swear that on your return you shall find him fat and well!'

"And I," murmured Father Lustucru, in a sepulchral voice, "*I* swear, that he shall die!"

III.

Mother Michel's good qualities, and Father Lustucru's villany, are revealed.

MOTHER MICHEL, worthy of the confidence placed in her, evinced a truly maternal tenderness for her charge; she took care of him, petted him, and fed him so well, that even in the district of the *Louvre*, where there were many magnificent cats, not one surpassed Moumouth in beauty. She watched

him constantly; served him with the choicest viands, and let him slumber upon the softest of eider-downs. Fearing that he might one day become ill, she procured different works upon the diseases of cats, and instructed herself upon this important subject. She even went so far as to read "*L'Histoire des Chats*," by François Auguste Paradis de Moncrif, member of the French Academy.

Mother Michel's conduct was not moved by vile and interested motives. This good old woman thought not of herself! Contented with little, she had already enough to live upon —for herself, she only desired a small room, brown bread, a spinning-wheel, and some firewood during the winter; but she had nephews, nieces, and god-children, whom she hoped to be able to provide for. She intended to bestow

the future gifts of Madame de la Grenouillière upon them.

Moumouth's increasing well-being exasperated Father Lustucru: he saw with horror the hour advance when his faithful guardian would be rewarded; he pondered continually upon the means of ruining her, by taking her four-footed ward away, and thus bringing her mistress' anger upon her. By solitary meditation he nourished his hatred and envy, until he no longer recoiled at the thought of a crime.

"How," said he, "shall I clear the house of this miserable cat?—What arms shall I employ against him?—Shall it be by the sword, by poison, or by water?—I will employ water!"

This resolution taken, he now only thought of executing it. It was not easy to seize Moumouth, for Mother Michel rarely let him out of her sight; and as the cat himself had not the least confidence in the major-domo, he was always upon his guard. Lustucru was obliged to wait several days before a favourable opportunity occurred.

One evening after an excellent repast, Moumouth curled himself up near the parlour fire, at the feet of Mother Michel, and slept. Father Lustucru entered.

"So, so," said he, "the cat sleeps! let us remove his guardian."

"How amiable it is in you to come to see me," said Mother Michel, politely; "are you well this evening?"

"Perfectly, but all are not like me: our porter is in a dreadful condition, he is suffering terribly from rheumatism, and would like to see you for a moment. You not only have kind words to console the afflicted, but have also excellent recipes to relieve their pains. Do pay a short visit to our friend Krautmann; I am sure that your presence will benefit him."

Mother Michel arose immediately, and went down to see the porter, who was really suffering from acute rheumatic pains.

"Now for us two!" exclaimed Father Lustucru.

Softly he crossed the hall, and took from the

bottom of a closet a covered basket which he had concealed there. Then he returned, and walking towards Moumouth, seized him suddenly by the neck. The unfortunate one, awaking with a start, found himself suspended in the air, face to face with his enemy,—Father Lustucru. In this horrible situation, he would have screamed, have struggled, have called for assistance, but time was not given him. The odious major-domo plunged the poor cat into the basket, and attached the lid firmly. He quickly reached the stairs; with haggard eyes and hair erect,—he looked like a man about to commit a heinous crime.

It was a beautiful February night; the sky was clear, the temperature dry and cold, and the moon shone brightly; but at times large clouds covered it entirely, and made the darkness dense. In order to reach a little door, the key of which he had procured, Father Lustucru was obliged to traverse the garden of the house. He glided from tree to tree, taking care to only enter the walks, when the shadows favoured him. He opened the door,—but hear-

ing voices and steps without, — he started involuntarily, stopped, and listened.

"How foolish," he said, after a moment's silence, "I forgot the carnival—it is only some masks that pass!"

It was, indeed, a party of masks from the *Palais Royal.* Lustucru waited until they were out of sight, and then he hurried on. As soon as he reached the quay, the joy that he found in his success was so great, that he commenced to whistle a gavot, and danced to it as he went along; his delight was like that of a cannibal leaping about his victim.

He went along the *Seine* as far as the bridge *Notre Dame*, then stopping in the centre of it, he raised the basket beyond the parapet, and turning it suddenly over, dashed the unhappy Moumouth into the icy river. The cat, whilst falling, uttered a scream which seemed almost human: the murderer shuddered: but his emotion was not of long duration, for putting his hands into his pockets, he said, with bitter raillery:

"I wish you a pleasant voyage, dear Mou-

mouth, and trust that you may reach the end of your journey in safety! But now I think of it," he added, "cats can swim—the rascal may not perish! Pooh, pooh, it is far from the bridge *Notre Dame* to the street *Saint Thomas du Louvre!*"

Reassured by this thought, Lustucru hastened back, entered the garden door, went cautiously to his room, and waited — prepared to

enjoy the lamentations of Mother Michel. She had tarried long with the sick man, and left him, remembering that it was time to give her cat the saucer of sugared milk with which she regaled him each evening.

She ascended, leisurely and calmly, to the parlour, without any presentiment of the sad blow which awaited her. When she perceived that Moumouth was no longer in the place which he had occupied, she merely thought that he had curled himself up behind the cushions of the sofa; she sought for him everywhere, even looking under the pieces of furniture — and then running to the stairs, called: "Moumouth! Moumouth!"

"He does not answer," she said; "but when I went down stairs, Lustucru was with him; perhaps he can give me news of his whereabouts!"

She immediately knocked at the major-domo's door, who pretending to have just awakened from a sound sleep, asked in a peevish tone of voice, what was wanted.

"Is Moumouth not here?"

"Does your cat ever come to me? You know that he cannot abide me."

"Alas, where is he? I left him in the parlour, near the fire, and now I cannot find him."

"Can he be lost?" inquired Father Lustucru, feigning intense anxiety.

"Lost! Oh, no, that is impossible; he must be in some corner of the house."

"We must look for him at once," said the knave, gravely; "we must find him. Moumouth is so precious an animal, that the servants shall be awakened to assist us."

All the house was aroused, and armed with torches; every hole and corner, from the cellar to the garret, from the court-yard to the garden, was examined. Lustucru directed the proceedings with apparent zeal. All in vain. Mother Michel exhausted with emotion, overcome by fatigue, threw herself, entirely crushed, into an arm-chair.

"Alas," said she, "I left him but for a moment! And it was to do a kindness!"

"I begin to think that your cat is decidedly

lost," said Lustucru in a severe tone, "it is a great misfortune for you! What will Madame de la Grenouillière say when she returns? She is capable of dismissing you!"

"Dismissing me!" exclaimed Mother Michel, drawing herself up suddenly to her full height; then she grew pale, her eyes closed, and she fell senseless.

Father Lustucru gazed upon her with dry eyes, and felt not the slightest remorse. The infamous man — laughed!

IV.

Mother Michel's cat displays great intelligence, and proves himself strong in adversity.

WE lost sight of Moumouth, at the moment, when precipitated from the bridge *Notre Dame*, he struggled in the waters. Hap-

pily for him, the pier of the principal arch had a ledge wide enough for him to cling to. From

thence he gazed about him. The *Seine* appeared to him a limitless ocean, and he deemed it beyond his strength to cross it. Rather than make the attempt, he preferred to remain where he was, even at the risk of perishing from hunger or cold, or of being washed away by a wave. He mewed at first, as a signal of distress, but soon deeming himself lost without hope, he concluded that it was useless for him to fatigue his chest, and he awaited his fate, with that resignation which formed the basis of his character.

Near five o'clock in the morning, two gentlemen, great lovers of fishing, from the Island *Saint Louis*, threw their lines over the bridge *Notre Dame*.

"You are matinal, neighbour Guignolet," said the last comer: "it seems that we have both had the same idea!"

"And we have done well, neighbour Croquemouche; the water rose last night, and quantities of fish have come down from the upper *Seine*; we must, indeed, be unskilful anglers, should we not take some of them."

"Let us divide our booty, neighbour Guignolet, and breakfast together to-day."

"Willingly!" said Mr. Guignolet. And they shook hands upon their agreement.

When Moumouth saw the lines descend, a ray of hope gleamed upon him; as soon as they were sufficiently near, he clung to them,

and the fishermen feeling an unusual weight, hastened to draw them up, crying: "A bite, a bite!"

"I wager that I have taken a barbel," said Mr. Guignolet, regretting in his satisfaction that he could not rub his hands together.

"I must have a large carp," rejoined Mr. Croquemouche.

He had scarcely finished his phrase when Moumouth leaped upon the parapet.

"Treason!" cried the two fishermen, as they hastened in pursuit of the quadruped, who had just been so miraculously rescued from the water; but he could run faster than they, and easily escaped. When alone, he stopped to take breath. Examining the houses around him, and finding that none of them resembled his own, he naturally concluded that it was not there. He must, however, procure a shelter; shivering with cold, and breathless from his flight, he could not have remained a moment longer in the street, without exposing himself to taking a heavy cold upon the chest. Guided by the light of an oven, he entered the cellar of a baker, hid himself behind a basket filled with loaves, and fell peacefully asleep.

He was awakened by hunger.

Moumouth was born of poor parents, who had abandoned him in his earliest infancy; brought up in the street, educated in the school

of adversity — he had been forced to provide for his own existence. He was thoroughly versed in the art of catching rats and mice—a most useful science — one too often neglected by cats living in rich houses. He watched, and soon spied a mouse that had just left his hole to feast upon the flour; he seized upon the imprudent creature (describing what the geometricians call a parabola), and bit its nose so as to prevent its screaming. This manœuvre, although conducted with skill and in silence, attracted the attention of a young journeyman baker.

"A cat!" cried the apprentice, arming himself with a shovel.

The master turned his eyes towards Moumouth, saw him busily engaged in eating his mouse, and said to the boy: "Do not harm him, he is rendering us a service."

"But where can he have come from?"

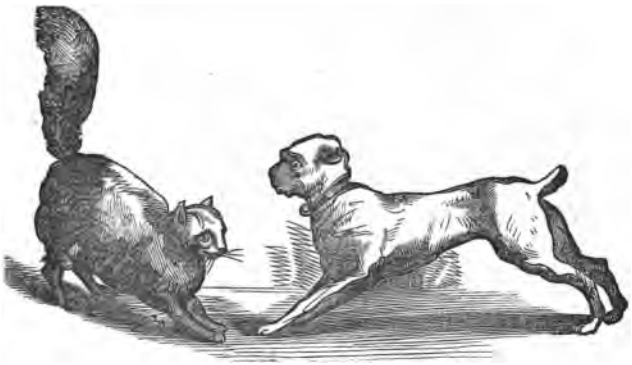
"What matters it," replied the baker, who was quite an enlightened man, "if he be useful to us! Eat, eat my friend," he continued, stooping down to pat Moumouth, "catch as many

mice as you can, there will always be too many left!"

Our cat profited by the permission. When his hunger was satiated, he wished to go in search of his home, but the baker placed himself before him.

"Stop!" cried he, "I needed a good cat; heaven has sent you to me, and I shall certainly keep you. Ho, Jacques, close the doors and windows, and if the rascal endeavour to escape, take a stick and give him two or three blows with it!"

Thus did Moumouth's host become his tyrant —personal interest depraves the best of characters! Our cat, seeming to understand what was said, leaped without hesitation upon the apprentice's shoulder, and from thence bounded into the thoroughfare. A new danger awaited him. Surprised by his sudden appearance, an enormous bulldog fiercely barred his way. Moumouth would have gladly escaped from so disadvantageous a combat; but, did he move to the right or to the left, the dog, growling in a menacing voice, followed all his movements.



Now they gazed for an instant upon each other; the bulldog, with his paws extended, his teeth ground together, his body drawn back; the cat, with open mouth, his back raised, his head bent forward. Neither seemed disposed to commence hostilities. At last, the dog throws himself upon his adversary, who skillfully avoids him, leaps over him, and hastens towards the quay; the bull dog follows him. They run through the peopled streets; they slip between the carriages; by a natural spirit of imitation, the stray dogs they meet join them, and soon the unfortunate Moumouth finds more than thirty-seven at his heels.

"I am lost," says he to himself, "but I will sell my life dearly!"

With hair erect, he leans against a wall; he steadies himself proudly, and gazes upon his numerous enemies with so fierce an eye, that all retreat as a single man. Taking advantage of their incertitude, Moumouth suddenly turns and scales the wall; he is soon beyond reach of the dogs, but he is not yet saved: should he make a false step, should his force abandon him, or the plaster become loosened beneath his claws, twenty yawning mouths, eager for carnage, are waiting to seize upon him in his fall!

Meanwhile, Mother Michel passed the night in weeping: she could not resign herself to the loss of Moumouth; moaning and with plaintive voice, she called for him incessantly, and, if we can believe the popular song, written about Mother Michel and her cat, she was heard crying from the window, "who will bring him back to me?"

At break of day, the perfidious Lustucru came to Mother Michel and inquired:

"Well, my dear companion, have you found him?"

"Alas! no," murmured she; "do you know anything of him?"

"Nothing positive;" said the major-domo, who wished to torment the poor woman; "but I dreamed of him; he appeared pale and emaciated, as though he were ill."

"Where was he?"

"It seemed to me, as though he were in a garden, at the foot of a lilac tree."

Mother Michel immediately rushed into the garden, where, as you well know, she did not find her lost pet. During the course of the day Lustucru amused himself by constantly adding to her misery, giving her a series of false joys, which were always followed by redoubled sadness.

"Mother Michel," he would say, "as I passed near the pantry, I thought I heard a sort of mewing."

And Mother Michel would instantly examine the pantry.

Or he would enter breathless, crying: "I am

almost certain that he is prowling about the cellar!"

And Mother Michel would venture into the sombre vaults of the cellar, only to meet with rats.

At nightfall, Lustucru gave utterance to these words; — they are transmitted to us in the above mentioned popular song,—

"Allez, la mère Michel,
Vot' chat n'est pas perdu;
Il est dans le grenier,
Qui fait la chasse aux rats,
Avec un fusil de paille
Et un sabre de bois."

Believe me, dear Mother Michel,
Your cat is not lost, I know well;
See how in the attic he stood,
With straw gun and sabre of wood,
With courage becoming your cat,
Hunting that bold robber the rat.

These lines were rendered with a bitter irony which Father Lustucru could not conceal. To assert that Moumouth was pursuing rats with a straw gun and a wooden sabre was most improbable. Has a cat ever been known to make

use of such weapons? But Mother Michel's anguish had unsettled her mind to such a degree, that she only heeded the word which gave her a faint glimmering of hope.

"In the attic!" she exclaimed; "let us hasten there, dear sir, let us seek him! Pray give me your arm; I am so uneasy, so troubled, so overcome by fatigue, that I have scarcely any strength left me."

Mother Michel, with a lantern in her hand, searched both the lumber-room and loft. Solitude and silence prevailed.

"You have again been mistaken," murmured she.

"No, no," replied the wicked man; "let us continue to search for him, and we shall end by finding him. We have not yet looked behind those fagots."

The credulous Mother Michel advanced towards the spot, and Lustucru beheld the cat, whom he thought drowned, full of health and vigour, gazing upon him with eyes filled with indignation.

"It is he, it is, indeed, himself!" cried Mo-

ther Michel, clasping Moumouth in her arms." Ah! my dear Mr. Lustucru, my good and true friend, how much I am indebted to you for having brought me here!"

The major-domo was little touched by thanks so undeserved. Sallow, motionless, cold as death, he bent his head before his resuscitated victim, whose escape he could not comprehend — it was, however, quite natural, Moumouth, pursued by dogs, had succeeded in scaling the wall; then, leaping from gutter to gutter, from garden to garden, from roof to roof, he had regained his own home. Fearing the resentment of his enemy, he had not dared to appear, and had hidden himself in the lumber-room.

"Am I under the influence of a nightmare?" said Father Lustucru to himself. "Is it really that rascal of a Moumouth, in flesh and bones, whom I see before me? Is it not his spirit come to torment me? — This cat must be the devil in person!"

The cat was not the devil — Providence had watched over him.

V.

Mother Michel's cat conquers his enemy.

THE events which we have related show the position of all parties. Fearing to lose her beloved cat, Mother Michel redoubled her vigilance and attentions. Moumouth, on his guard, vowed to avoid the major-domo, or if obliged to defend himself, to fight him with both claws and teeth. As to Father Lustucru, his disappointment but increased his rage; he

now not only desired the destruction of poor innocent Moumouth, from feelings of jealousy towards Mother Michel, but from hatred to the cat.

"Oh, height of humiliation!" he said to himself with vexation, "I ought to hide myself; I should retire into a desert, or sink into the bowels of the earth!—Must I confess, that I, Jérôme Lustucru, a man of mature years, a man of experience and learning,—a man—I may venture to say charming in society—am conquered, scoffed at, made a dupe of by a cat; a cat picked from the gutters!—I leave him at the bottom of the river, and find him at the top of the house! I wish to separate him from his guardian—and I bring about their reunion! I lead Mother Michel to the garret that I may revel in her grief, and am but a witness to her transports of joy! The cat I looked upon as dead, reappears to defy me!—He shall not bid me defiance long!"

And Father Lustucru remained lost in deep meditation.

On that day Moumouth had not yet dined,

and by expressive mewings he intimated that he would gladly partake of something. Mother Michel immediately said to him,—for she conversed with him as though he were a rational being:

"Patience, sir, you shall be attended to!"

She left the parlour, which, since the departure of Madame de la Grenouillière, she now usually occupied, and the cat, who followed her, was much chagrined at seeing her proceed to Lustucru's apartment. He, nevertheless, entered, for he was convinced that the major-domo would not dare to attack him in the presence of his faithful friend.

When she knocked at the door, Father Lustucru had just taken from a shelf a green paper, labelled: "*Death to Rats.*"

"This is what I need," said he, carefully placing the paper in his waistcoat pocket; "what is *death to rats*, must also be *death to cats;* our dear Moumouth shall try it——"

"How can I serve you, my good Madame Michel?"

"It is five o'clock, Mr. Lustucru, and you forget my cat."

"I forget him!" exclaimed the major-domo, clasping his hands as though deeply hurt by such a suspicion: "I was just thinking of him. —I will prepare so delicious a dish for him— that he will never wish for another!"

"Thank you, Mr. Lustucru; Madame the Countess shall be made acquainted with your attentions to her favourite. I received a letter from her to-day: she informs me that she will soon return, that she hopes to find Moumouth in good health, and that she intends to make me a handsome present. You can understand my joy, Mr. Lustucru! My sister is a widow with four children; I give her my little savings every year, but the amount is so trifling—now thanks to the promised gift of Madame de la Grenouillière — the poor children can be sent to school, and be taught a good trade."

Whilst pronouncing these words, Mother Michel's eyes glistened, and her countenance beamed with joy at the thought of doing a kindness. The major-domo listened with the

greatest indifference. He had abandoned himself so entirely to his evil passions, that they now mastered him completely; they cloaked his soul, and had stifled by degrees every virtuous sentiment that he might once have possessed.

Moumouth seemed to understand the man; he approached Mother Michel, who had seated herself to chat for a moment, and gazing at her with imploring eyes, pulled the bottom of her dress, as much as to say, "let us go."

"Take care!" said the good woman, you will tear my dress."

Moumouth commenced anew.

"Do you wish to go?" she inquired.

Moumouth gave several little leaps in reply.

"Decidedly," she added, "the cat is only at his ease in the parlour."

She arose and left the room, preceded by Moumouth, who jumped with joy.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, the majordomo had made a most appetizing dish, composed of the breast of chicken, bread of the best quality, and other ingredients highly

esteemed by epicures. After mixing a large dose of the rat poison with it, he placed it in the hall, and called out as he partially opened the parlour door:

"The gentleman is served."

A thrill of pleasure passed through Moumouth, upon perceiving this delicate repast, for—to tell the truth—he was somewhat of a gourmand. He advanced his nose towards the plate—and suddenly recoiled, with bristling back—for he noticed that a fulsome and nauseous odour emanated from the dish. He walked around it, smelt at it, and again left

it. The sagacious animal had detected the poison.

"This is very extraordinary!" said Mother Michel. After having vainly offered the food to her cat, she sought out Lustucru, and told him what had occurred. The traitor listened with suppressed rage.

"What!" he said, "he has refused to eat it! —He cannot be hungry."

"I presume not, Mr. Lustucru, for your dish looks beautifully; I could eat of it myself; indeed I have a mind to taste it, to give an example to Moumouth."

At these words, Father Lustucru, in spite of the hardness of his heart, could not refrain from shuddering. For a moment he felt horror for his crime, and hastened to say to the good woman:

"Do not, I pray you!"

"Why! Is there anything hurtful in it?"

"No, of course not," stammered Lustucru; "but that which has been prepared for a cat should not be eaten by a Christian. We must

keep up appearances, and never seek to lower the dignity of human nature."

Mother Michel did not contest his reasoning, but said, quite abruptly:

"Well, Moumouth must do the best he can! I will not yield to all his caprices, and I shall give him nothing else!"

The next morning the dish was untouched. The major-domo had hoped, that the cat pressed by hunger would have finally devoured the poisoned food; but Moumouth knew how to suffer patiently, he abstained—and living only upon scraps and crusts of dry bread, drew back with terror whenever the fatal dish was offered him. It remained at last forgotten in a corner of the hall closet.

Father Lustucru, again defeated, was vexed beyond all expression. The wish to be delivered from the presence of Moumouth became a fixed idea, an absorbing passion, a monomania. He dreamed of it by night and by day. Every letter from Madame de la Grenouillière, inquiring after the cat, and reiterating the promise of a reward to Mother Michel, every proof

of interest which the Countess showed her two *protégés*, but inflamed the fury of their enemy. As he wished not to compromise himself, he imagined various schemes for the destruction of Moumouth; after rejecting many, he at last decided upon this: —

There was in Mother Michel's bed-room, a marble bust of Louis XIV., wearing a Roman cuirass, and a wig entwined with laurel, which stood upon a heavy block. Behind the bust there was a small oval window, opening upon the stairway, and directly beneath it was placed the soft cushion which formed the bed of Moumouth, who — did the bust think of falling — would be inevitably crushed by it.

One night Lustucru entered Mother Michel's room, unfastened the little window, and leaving it a crack open, crept noiselessly away. At midnight, when all were sleeping, he placed himself upon the stairway, and leaning against the baluster, with the aid of a long broom pushed the bust: it fell upon the cushion with a terrible noise. The wicked man had foreseen the effects of this manœuvre;—it was the signal

of his triumph, and Moumouth's death — yet when he heard the bust rolling heavily upon the floor, he was overcome with terror — with trembling steps he reached his own room.

Mother Michel awoke with a start: she was in total darkness, and had no means of procuring a light — for German matches had not yet been invented. Surprise and terror at first deprived her of the use of her voice; then she cried: "stop thief!" with all the strength of her lungs. Soon the servants, leaving their beds, rushed in to know what had happened. Lustucru, but half-dressed, his head enveloped in a cotton night-cap, was the last to appear.

"What is the matter?" he inquired.

"I see now," replied Mother Michel; "the bust of Louis XIV. has fallen."

"Then," said Father Lustucru, feigning astonishment, "if that be the case, your cat must have received it upon his head!"

As he said these words, Moumouth crept from beneath the bedstead, and springing towards Mother Michel, seemed to ask for suc-

cour and protection. Lustucru stood confounded.

Every one knows how light is the sleep of a cat; Moumouth, who was always on the alert, hearing some one move cautiously behind the window, quickly arose—like most animals, he was curious, and sought to gratify his curiosity —planted himself in the middle of the room, and wondered why a long-handled broom should advance through a window, at so late an hour of the night. Frightened by the fall of the bust, he had sought refuge in the back of the alcove.

Mother Michel drank a glass of sugar and water, flavoured with orange-flower water to settle her nerves; the great king, whose nose and chin were broken, and who had lost the half of his wig in the fall, was picked up, and all hastened once more to bed.

"Saved again!" said Lustucru to himself; "will he always thus escape? Shall I not be able to send him *ad patres* before Madame de la Grenouillière's return? Shall Mother Michel receive the pension of fifteen hundred francs a

year, and shall I always remain poor? This villanous cat mistrusts me; everything that I undertake against him fails — I must have an accomplice!"

VI.

Father Lustucru confides his odious projects to Nicholas Faribole.

FATHER LUSTUCRU sought an accomplice. At first he thought of making a confidant of one of the servants in the house, but he remembered that they all were devoted to Mother Michel, and should they betray him, he would be dismissed from a house where he occupied so lucrative and honourable a position,

covered with disgrace; still he must have assistance. From what class of life, of what age, of what sex, should he select him? Preoccupied with these ideas, Lustucru went out one morning, at about twenty-five minutes past six, to take a walk along the quays. As he crossed the threshold, he noticed, on the other side of the street, a tall, thin, angular woman, clad in gaudy and incongruous colours. She had hollow eyes, a sallow complexion, a hooked nose, and her skin was as wrinkled as that of an old pippin. She was talking to a boy, about fourteen years old, who was covered with rags, but whose countenance was quick and intelligent. Lustucru thought he had seen this strange looking woman before, but he could not remember where. Possibly he might have endeavoured to recall her to his memory, but the thought of destroying the cat absorbed him completely, so — with care-worn air, with bent head, arms crossed upon his breast, and eyes fixed intently upon the ground, as if from thence must spring his accomplice — he passed on his way. He wandered thus for some time;

the morning breeze refreshed not his blood, heated as it was by evil passions, neither did the clear blue sky, the singing of birds as they sported by the river side, nor the rising sun bring calm to his troubled mind.

When he returned, the old woman had disappeared; but the boy was still there, seated upon a stone, with his nose in the air steadfastly contemplating Madame de la Grenouillière's house. Lustucru approached him and accosted him in the following terms:

"What are you doing, my lad?"

"I! Nothing; I am looking at that house."

"I can readily believe that; but why?"

"Because it is so beautiful. I should dearly like to live in it; what happiness to be one of its inmates!"

"Yes," replied the major-domo with emphasis; "the days glide by most tranquilly there. What is the name of the woman with whom you spoke a short time since?"

"It was Madame Bradamor."

"Madame Bradamor, the famous fortune-teller, who lives at the end of the street?"

"Yes."

"Do you know her?"

"Slightly, I sometimes run errands for her."

"Ah, indeed!—And what did the old sorceress tell you?"

"She told me that if I could be employed as a servant in that house, I would lead a happy life."

"Madame de la Grenouillière is absent now, my little friend, and there is no vacancy in her household."

"What a pity!" said the young boy, with a deep sigh.

Lustucru prepared to enter the house, and laid his hand upon the knocker of the door; then he suddenly turned and walked towards the child.

"What is your name?" he inquired.

"Nicholas Langlumé, after my father; but I am better known by the nickname of Faribole."

"What is your profession?"

"I have none; my father works at the harbour, and I earn my bread as I can. I run

errands, hawk may-bugs, blackbirds, and sparrows; pick up nails in the gutters, which I sell upon the quay *de la Ferraille*, open the doors of hired carriages, fish logs out of the *Seine*, sing songs upon the *Pont Neuf*, light the coloured lamps that are used upon the king's birthday, and sometimes play the monsters at Monsieur Nicolet's theatre. All these trades, my good sir, are as nothing beside a permanent one, and often I am in want of a dinner."

"You interest me," said Father Lustucru, "and I feel inclined to advance you in the world. Tell me, Faribole, have you any taste for the kitchen?"

"I am fond of good eating, but my means do not allow me——"

"I do not ask you if you are a gourmand, booby. I ask you if you have any inclination for cooking?"

"I do not know, I have never tried."

"Well, Faribole, I will give you some lessons; come, follow me. I will dress you, and take care of you at my own expense, until Madame de la Grenouillière arrives. She is a

good woman, and will probably keep you; but should she not do so, your education will have been commenced, and you can easily take service elsewhere."

"You are attached then to the Countess' household?"

"I am her major-domo!" said Lustucru, proudly.

Faribole's eyes sparkled with pleasure, and bowing respectfully, he said: "How much I am indebted to you!"

Faribole entered into service the same day, and was cordially received by the other servants. He was a good-humoured lad, quick and obliging; although somewhat awkward in his new clothes, and clumsy in his novel occupations, he strove to make himself useful.

"Faribole," said the major-domo, to his *protégé*, a few days afterwards, "it will be well to teach you the customs of the house. There is an all powerful individual here, who reigns as master, whose wishes are obeyed, and whose caprices are anticipated, — this individual is a cat. If you wish to please every one, you

must humour the cat Moumouth; if the cat Moumouth accords you his affection, you are certain to give satisfaction both to Madame de la Grenouillière and Mother Michel, her companion."

"The cat shall be my friend, and I will be the friend of the cat," replied the young rogue, with assurance.

Accordingly, Faribole so overwhelmed Mou-

mouth with caresses, and treated him so well, that the cat, although naturally distrustful, conceived a lively attachment for him: he would take joy in following him, and by little tricks

and gambols would constantly endeavour to attract his notice. Mother Michel was almost jealous of the little boy; whilst Father Lustucru, who had his own views, laughed in his sleeve and rubbed his hands.

One evening he called Faribole into his room, and carefully closing the door — after having ascertained that no one was listening — said: "Moumouth is your friend, you have followed my advice."

"And I shall remain in the house, is it not so?" inquired the child.

"Probably! You like it, then, here?"

"Certainly; I, who lived upon brown bread, now make four good repasts a day; I, who wore an old blouse, full of holes, and a patched pair of breeches, am now clad like a prince; I suffer no longer from cold, and instead of sleeping in the open air, I repose every night on an excellent bed, where I dream of gingerbread and cream-cakes."

Father Lustucru rested his chin upon the palm of his right hand, and fixed his piercing eyes upon Faribole, saying: "If you were obliged to resume the vagabond life from which I took you, what then?"

"I think that I should die with grief!"

"You would do everything then to remain in your present situation?"

"I would do everything."

"Everything?"

"Absolutely everything."

"Well, this is what I imperatively require of you: Moumouth follows you of his own accord; you must entice him into the garden at nightfall; you will put him into a bag that I

have made for the purpose; you will draw the strings of the bag——"

"And then!" asked Faribole, opening his eyes with wonder.

"We will each arm ourselves with a stick and will strike the bag, until he is dead."

"Never, never!" cried the poor boy, whose hair stood on end, with horror.

"Then make up your bundle quickly, and go; I discharge you!"

"You discharge me!" exclaimed young Faribole, raising his hands towards Heaven.

"You shall not remain five minutes longer in this house; I am your master, and you depend entirely upon me!"

The unhappy Faribole commenced to weep, and the major-domo, added in a furious tone of voice: "Come, no nonsense! Off with your clothes, take your rags, and disappear!"

After speaking thus, Lustucru drew from a closet the miserable garments which Faribole wore the day he arrived, and seizing them between his thumb and forefinger, threw them

contemptuously upon the floor. The child gazed sadly at the clothes with which he was now covered, compared them with those which he was forced to resume, and—the comparison not being in their favour — he sobbed bitterly. However, he was determined not to purchase his fine apparel by perfidy and murder. He courageously took off his coat, and then his waistcoat, but at the thoughts of leaving his new shoes, and walking again barefooted, upon gravel and pieces of broken glass, the unfortunate Faribole hesitated a moment, and Father Lustucru, like a skilful diplomat, took advantage of the circumstance.

"Fool," said he, "you refuse good luck when it is within your grasp. Were I to propose the death of a man to you, I could understand, and even approve of your scruples; but I propose that of a cat, merely a cat! What is there so terrible in this? What is a cat? Nothing; less than nothing; not the slightest value is attached to the life of a cat! Tavernkeepers serve them up to their customers; cele-

brated physicians, whilst making their experiments, massacre them by hundreds. Cats are so little thought of, that when a mother brings seven or eight of them into the world, only one is kept, and the others are thrown into the river."

"But Moumouth is grown up, Moumouth is educated," said Faribole, in a plaintive voice, "and then you do not know — I love him."

"You love him! You dare to love him!" cried the major-domo in inexpressible rage, "well, *I* detest him, and I desire his death!"

"But what has he done to you?"

"What matters it to you? I wish his death! That is sufficient."

"Have mercy upon him!" said Faribole, throwing himself at the feet of the implacable Lustucru.

"No mercy!" replied Lustucru, in a hissing voice, "no pity either for him or for you! Take yourself off this instant! It is raining in torrents — you will be wet through, you will

die from exposure to-night—so much the better!"

The rain, mingled with hail, beat against the window panes, and the wind blowing violently filled the long corridors of the house with its mournful moaning. Then poor Faribole thought upon the cold which would chill him through and through, upon the privations which awaited him, upon his slender resources, upon his immense appetite, upon the discomfort of sleeping upon the damp banks of the *Seine:* the genius of evil seized upon him, and whispered in his ear: "What is a cat?"

"Mr. Lustucru," he said, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, "do not send me away, I will do all that you wish."

"To-morrow, at dusk, you will entice Moumouth into the garden?"

"Yes, Mr. Lustucru."

"You will put him into this bag?"

"Yes, Mr. Lustucru."

"And you will beat him?"

The answer to this question was long com-

ing. Faribole grew pale, his legs gave way beneath him; at last, bending his head and letting his arms fall helplessly, he yielded to his fate, and murmured in an inaudible voice:

"Yes, Mr. Lustucru."

VII.

Father Lustucru triumphs, and Mother Michel's cat finds himself in a grievous position

LUSTUCRU had chosen the following evening for Moumouth's death, as he knew that Mother Michel intended to take to the coach-office the money she always laid aside for her sister.

Faribole had been plunged in the deepest

grief all day, and, as the fatal hour drew near, the irresolution of yesterday seized him anew. When Mother Michel said to him, before going out: "I confide Moumouth to you; take good care of him, and play with him, so that he may not feel lonely during my absence,"—the good lad felt his heart fail him,—his loyal nature revolted against the base act he was about to commit.

"Come, we have not a moment to lose," said Father Lustucru, hurrying to him; "here is the bag, bring the animal!"

Faribole again implored the pity of the major-domo; he became eloquent; with voice choked with tears, he made the most pathetic appeal, but all without effect. The cruel wretch was inflexible; he renewed his threats, he insisted upon the cat's death, and Faribole, overruled by his evil genius, was forced to obey.

Moumouth was enticed into the garden; he followed his perfidious friend with all the confidence of the lamb following the butcher to the slaughter, and at a moment when he least

expected it, he found himself imprisoned in the bag which was to become his tomb. Lustucru, who had concealed himself, suddenly appeared, carrying two enormous cudgels, handed one to his accomplice, and seizing upon the bag, cried: "Come, to work, and no quarter!"

Faribole did not hear him; he seemed stupefied; his haggard eyes rolled wildly; his face was ghastly, his mouth was wide open, and his arms were paralyzed. Father Lustucru, animated by the hope of speedy vengeance, did not observe his companion; he threw the bag roughly upon the ground, raised his stick, and was about to strike, when the small garden gate opened.

"Interrupted!" he muttered; "Faribole, wait in the walk; I will rejoin you instantly."

He approached the person who had just entered, and stood petrified with astonishment upon beholding Mother Michel. He thought at first that some vague suspicion, or instinctive presentiment had caused her return; but

he was speedily reassured, upon hearing her say:

"I am obliged to defer my walk, for I see Madame de la Grenouillière's carriage; she has been forced to take a circuitous route, as they are repairing the street. I have preceded her by entering this gate: come, Mr. Lustucru, come quickly to meet our good mistress."

"I follow you, Madame," said the major-domo; then making a speaking trumpet of his hand, he cried out to Faribole: "Strike by yourself! Strike until the cat no longer moves!" and hastened to join Mother Michel in the large court-yard, where the servants were already drawn up in a line, like a well disciplined battalion.

Madame de la Grenouillière upon alighting from her carriage, honoured her servitors with kind looks, embraced her companion with touching familiarity, and inquired after Moumouth.

"Your pet is remarkably well," said Mother Michel; "he grows fat and handsome; and I

can truthfully say, that his moral qualities even exceed his personal attractions."

"Poor fellow, if he did not love me, he would be a monster of ingratitude, for since our separation I have thought constantly of him! Heaven has deprived me of many beings who were dear to me, but Moumouth will be the consolation of my old days!"

As soon as the Countess had given a few indispensible orders, she begged Mother Michel to bring Moumouth to her. She replied: "He will be charmed to see you, once more, Madame; he is in the garden, in charge of Faribole, a young man, whom your major-domo has seen proper to admit into your service: this little fellow and the cat have become intimate friends."

Mother Michel went into the garden, and found there only Faribole, who, with a preoccupied air, was seated upon a bench, pulling the leaves from a branch of box-wood, which he held in his hand.

"My lad," said the good woman, "the

Countess wishes you to bring Moumouth to her."

"Moumouth!" stammered Faribole, starting at the name, as though he had been stung by a wasp.

"Yes, Moumouth; I thought that he was with you."

"He has just left me; some passers by in the street made a noise, which frightened him, and he fled down one of the walks."

Mother Michel, after passing more than half an hour in searching the garden, returned, and said to Madame de la Grenouillière: "Moumouth is absent, Madame, but do not be uneasy; he disappeared once before, and we found him in the attic."

"Let them search for him! I will not wait, I wish to see him at once!"

Alas! This desire could never be gratified, were the words exchanged in the dark between Lustucru and his accomplice to be relied upon.

"Did you strike well?"

"Yes, Mr. Lustucru, I struck until the cat had ceased to move."

"What did you do with his dead body?"

"I took it to the *Seine*."

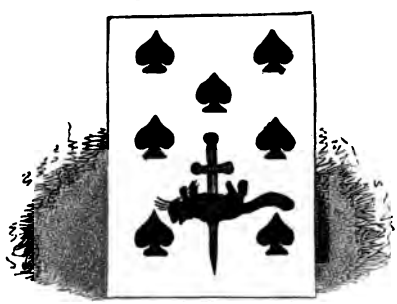
"Are you sure that he was really dead?"

"He no longer stirred."

"And the bag was carefully closed: justice has been done!"

VIII.

Mother Michel in search of her cat.



SEVERAL days passed in painful suspense; but, like General Marlborough, the cat Moumouth did not return. Without screams, without outbursts of grief, but all the more violent from being outwardly so calm, Madame de la Grenouillière's despair was real and profound. She was constantly recalling Mou-

mouth's pretty ways, his good nature, his attachment to herself, and his superior intelligence. She had never met with an animal endowed with so many brilliant qualities; the loss of her former favourites had never caused her such bitter regret. Generous in the midst of her unhappiness, she addressed no reproaches to Mother Michel; she sought, on the contrary, to calm the poor woman, who abandoned herself without reserve to her grief. She said to her one evening: "What can be done against an inevitable evil? Man can only show his wisdom by bowing before the decrees of Heaven."

"I should submit," replied Mother Michel; "if like you, I believed in Moumouth's death. Without a murmur, I would resign myself to what is irrevocable; but I have an idea that he still lives. I see him wandering about town, badly treated, perhaps a prey to the saucepans of the multitude——"

"You deceive yourself, Mother Michel, Moumouth is dead, or he would have assuredly returned to us."

"Something tells me that he is still of this world, and if you would like to have tidings of him, Madame, you need only address yourself——"

"To whom?"

"To our neighbour, Madame Bradamor, the celebrated fortune teller; she foretells coming events, removes stains made by rust, reads in the book of fate, and cures toothache."

"Fie, Mother Michel! How can you, a sensible person, put any faith in the jugglery of an intriguing woman?"

"But, Madame, I am not the only one that does so; the noblest lords visit Madame Bradamor: she is more learned than others of her profession, and yet charges less—she only asks twenty crowns to show you the devil Astaroth."

"Enough, for pity's sake," dryly replied the Countess.

Mother Michel was silent; but she decided that she would visit the necromancer at her first leisure moment. Madame Bradamor occupied spacious and richly furnished apartments;

for her art had made her rich. The room, in which she held her consultations, was hung with black velvet, dotted with tinsel stars; several obelisks, an electric battery, retorts, and many instruments — the uses of which were quite unknown to the pretended sorceress, but which filled the minds of the weak and timid, who came to visit her with awe — were placed upon a square table. She seemed slightly embarrassed upon beholding Mother Michel; however, after closing a glass door which communicated with her other rooms, she advanced, bowed to her client, and said, in a solemn voice:

"What do you desire?"

"To interrogate the present, the past, and the future."

"I can satisfy you," replied Madame Bradamor; "but what you ask of me will cost you three crowns."

"Here—I give them to you willingly."

Madame Bradamor pocketed the money — regretting that she had not asked for more, and began thus:

"What is the month and date of your birth?"

"The 24th of May, 1698."

"What are the initials of your Christian name, of your surname, and of the place of your birth?"

"A. R.; M.; and N. L. S."

Madame Michel's maiden name had been Anastasie Ravageot; twelve years previous she had lost her husband, François Michel, who had been, during his lifetime, *taster of salted butter* at the *Halle* in Paris. She was born at *Noisy le Sec.*

"What is your favourite flower?"

"Jerusalem artichokes."

After these inquiries, the pythoness examined some coffee-grounds which she poured into a saucer, and said: "Phaldarus, the spirit of all occult objects, informs me that you are in search of a being who is dear to you——"

Mother Michel started from her chair, in surprise. Madame Bradamor continued: "This being is not a man, but a quadruped, a dog, or

a cat.—Ariel, the celestial spirit, reveals to me that it is a cat."

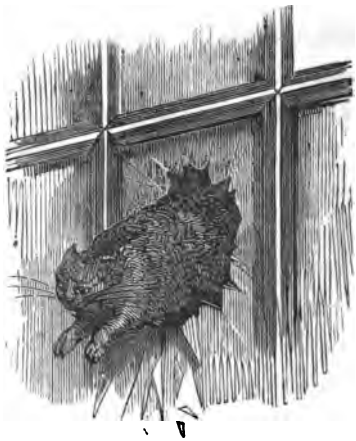
Mother Michel was more and more satisfied. Without giving her time to recover, the soothsayer took a pack of cards and shuffled them; then she gave them to her to cut, three times, and placing them in symmetrical order upon the table, said gravely:

"Your cat is the knave of clubs; let us see what happens to him. One, two, three, four: ten of spades! He is a rover, he has taken a fancy to travel, he sets out at night to see the sights of Paris. One, two, three, four: the queen of spades! She is a woman who fabricates ermine from the skins of cats. One, two, three, four: the knave of spades! He is a rag-picker. One, two, three, four: the king of spades! He is a restaurant keeper. The union of these three persons appals me. One, two, three, four: clubs! One, two, three, four: clubs again! One, two, three, four: always clubs! Your cat will bring money to these three persons: the rag-picker wishes to kill him, in order to sell his skin to the furrier, and his

body to the restaurant keeper, who will serve him up to his customers, as a ragout of rabbit. Will the cat be able to escape from his persecutors? One, two, three, four: seven of spades! It is all over, Madame, your cat no longer exists!"

"They have eaten him, the cannibals!" cried Mother Michel, overcome by this revelation, she even fancied she heard a plaintive mewing —Moumouth's last cry of agony. It was no illusion: a cat really mewed; he mewed again in the adjoining room. One of the panes of glass in the door was suddenly broken into a thousand pieces, and Moumouth in person fell at Mother Michel's feet. He had perceived his dear old friend from the top of a wardrobe, and had called to her several times, but, as she did not notice him, he had thrown himself, half-frenzied, against the door, and forcing a passage, had liberated himself.

"My cat was in your house!" exclaimed Mother Michel; "you stole him! But my mistress is powerful; my mistress is the Countess



Yolande de la Grenouillière: she will have you chastised, as you deserve!"

Whilst uttering these threats, she placed Moumouth under her arm, and walked towards the door. Madame Bradamor stopped her, saying: "Take pity upon me, do not ruin me! I did not steal your cat."

"Then what is he doing here?"

"I received him from a young lad, named Faribole; he brought me the cat, for I had long desired to possess him; his peculiar form and supernatural appearance was of use to me in many of my cabalistic conjurations. This

is the truth, the whole truth. Pray, do not let your mistress annoy me!"

"The Countess will act as she sees fit," replied Mother Michel, haughtily, as she disappeared with her cat. She took but one step from Madame Bradamor's house to her own home; you would have thought she had upon her feet the seven league boots of little Hop-o'-my-Thumb. She did not stop until she reached the parlour, where she arrived breathless and speechless. She showed Moumouth to Madame de la Grenouillière, who, upon recognizing her pet, uttered so piercing a scream of joy, that it was heard as far as the *Place du Carrousel.*

Lustucru assisted at this touching scene; upon beholding his victim he was so astounded that his reason was momentarily shaken. He imagined that the cat, so often rescued, was a fantastic being, endowed with speech as were the animals in fairy tales, and whispered to himself, trembling:

"I am lost; Moumouth will denounce me!"

CONCLUSION.

All are made happy saving the guilty one.

AS soon as Madame de la Grenouillière learned where Moumouth had been found, she ordered Faribole to be brought before her.

"I will go for him," said Father Lustucru, officiously, seeking to escape, that he might caution his accomplice.

"No, remain! You admitted him into the house, you shall see him turned away from it; in future learn to place your confidence more worthily."

Lustucru obeyed, and having recovered from his fright, he resolved that should Faribole dare to accuse him of attempting to destroy Moumouth's life, he would deny everything boldly.

As soon as Faribole entered the parlour, without waiting to be questioned, he said: "Madame, the presence of your cat makes me conjecture why you have sent for me; but I am not so guilty as I seem: allow me to exculpate myself."

"Wherefore!" asked Madame de la Grenouillière; "your justification is impossible."

The major-domo, with much apparent assurance, said, ironically: "I am curious to hear what improbable story the fellow will relate to you;" and, accentuating each word, he gave Faribole a look, which signified: "Woe to you, if you accuse me!"

Without being in the least disconcerted, Faribole resumed: "I must confess, Madame, that I entered your house with the intention of stealing your cat; the fortune-teller wished him to figure in the *rôle* of the devil Astaroth,

and she seduced me with the promise of a crown of six francs, and a pair of sabots. I was so well treated here, and I became so attached to Moumouth, that I renounced my culpable project; I should never, no, never have put it into execution, if I had not perceived that it was necessary to remove Moumouth from the attacks of an enemy, who was all the more terrible from being hidden."

"Of whom does he speak?" inquired Lustucru.

"Of you! Of you, who said to me: 'kill Moumouth, or I will discharge you!'"

"I said that! What an impudent falsehood! —Ah! Countess, you know me well enough not to hesitate between this rascal's accusation and my formal denial."

"Faribole," said the Countess, severely, "what you assert is grave; can you give me any proof of the truth of your story?"

"Proof! Alas! no, madame; but I am ready to testify——"

"That is sufficient," interrupted the Coun-

tess; "do not add calumny to the theft of the cat; leave my presence."

Poor Faribole would have protested; but upon a sign from Madame de la Grenouillière, Lustucru seized him by the arm and dragging him down stairs, shook him so violently, that the little fellow gladly crept away.

However, the iniquities of the major-domo were not to remain long unpunished, for the same day, whilst Mother Michel was putting the hall closet in order, she was much astonished to find the dead bodies of three rats and

three mice—wondering what had caused their death, she espied the famous dish which the cat had refused to eat, and which had been left there forgotten. Such was the violence of the poison that two of the mice had died so suddenly that they were unable to leave the plate! This discovery brought to light the villany of Lustucru. Mother Michel, suspecting that Faribole's accusation was not without foundation, hastened to apprise Madame de la Grenouillière of the circumstance, who recommending silence, sent for the major-domo.

"Have you any more rat poison?" she asked.

"Yes, madame, I think I must have a small quantity left."

"You should put some in the hall; have you never thought of doing so?"

"Never, madame; I was not aware that there were any rats in this part of the house."

"That is all, you may go."

Madame de la Grenouillière wrote to a celebrated chemist, who, after analyzing the contents of the dish, declared that it contained a

prodigious quantity of subtle poison. Lustucru's crime was evident; but other charges were soon raised against him. The adventure of Messrs Croquemouche and Guignolet had become known to the watermen; Faribole heard of it from one of them, and discovered a witness who had seen Lustucru throw the cat over the bridge *Notre Dame*. The major-domo was confounded; he did not wait to be discharged, but fled, and dreading the vengeance

of Madame de la Grenouillière, he embarked as cook, upon a merchant vessel, bound for Oceanica.

The ship, as they afterwards heard, was lost upon the coast of the Sandwich Islands, and Lustucru was eaten by the savages. History reports that at the moment of expiring, he pronounced but a single word — Moumouth! But what brought this name upon the guilty man's lips? Was it remorse? Or was it merely caused by unrelenting hatred? This is what history has neglected to tell us.

Madame de la Grenouillière's health had been very much weakened by the violent shocks she had endured from the loss of so many beloved animals. The winning ways and the devotion of Moumouth would have probably sufficed to prolong her life, but this respectable lady had attained an age when sorrows wound mortally. Mother Michel had the grief of finding her one morning, dead in her bed; her countenance was so calm and so peaceful, that she seemed only sleeping. She was just entering her seventy-ninth year.

In her will, which she had deposited at her notary's, she had settled upon Moumouth and her companion, two thousand francs a year, reversible, in case of the death of one of the legatees, upon the survivor.

Mother Michel went to live in *Bas Meudon*, near her sister; she selected for her own home a pretty little house, situated upon the banks of the river, surrounded by trees, and was able to advance the interests of all her relatives.

Faribole, who had been reinstated in the Countess' household, had, by his irreproachable conduct, caused his transient error to be forgotten. He would, no doubt, have received promotion in the kitchen, but he preferred to serve the State, and enrolled, at the age of sixteen, in a regiment of infantry. He served in the expedition to Majorca, under the command of Marshal Richelieu, and was made corporal, after the capture of Port Mahon, on the 29th of June, 1756. When his term of service expired, he went to live with Mother Michel, whom he loved with a truly filial affection. The course of their once agitated exis-

tence now flowed peacefully and calmly on, and was rendered happy by the ever increasing perfections of Moumouth.

Our cat never found another enemy; on the contrary, he won the esteem and affection of all his fellow-citizens. His adventures had made him celebrated. Besides the song, of which there now unfortunately remains but two couplets, the poets of the period wrote in his honour a number of quatrains which have not been preserved. His praises were sung in all languages, even in the Syriac and Armoric. He received visits from the most distinguished men of the age, including that of the king himself, who stopped to see him for a moment one day on his way to the *Chatêau de Bellevue.* A great lady of the court condescended to choose a pretty and gentle companion for Moumouth, whom he accepted with gratitude. He soon became a father; this event completed his happiness, as well as that of Mother Michel, for the excellent woman lived again in the posterity of her cat.

You desire to know what became of Mou-

mouth, do you not? He died!—but it was after a long and happy career. As his eyes closed in death, they rested with sweet satisfaction upon his weeping children and grand-children, who were grouped about him. His mortal re-

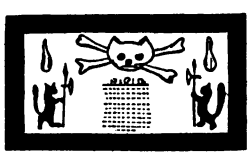
mains were not treated like those of vulgar cats. Mother Michel had a magnificent mausoleum of white marble erected to his memory. According to a custom, then adopted at the

interments of all illustrious personages, an epitaph composed by a professor of the University of Paris, was engraved upon Moumouth's tomb.

HOC JACET IN TUMULO, MULTIS VIRTUTIBUS INGENS,
FELES, APUD GALLOS MOUMOUTHI COGNOMINE NOTUS,
RANIPARÆ COMITIS, NECNON MICHOELIS AMORES;
QUEM LUSTUCRUTUS QUIDAM, PRAVISSIMUS HOSTIS,
FLUCTIBUS, ARSENICO, VOLUIT BACULOQUE NECARE,
AT DEUS OMNIPOTENS SOLIO VIGILABAT AB ALTO;
INNOCUI VINDEX, SONTEM PROSTRAVIT INIQUUM,
ET MOUMOUTHUS TANDEM, POST ASPERA FATA TRIUMPHANS,
EXTINCTAM AUSPICIIS VITAM DECURRIT AMOENIS.
MAGNO VALDE POTES PLANCTU LUGERE, VIATOR,
NAMQUE SEQUANENSI MOUMOUTHUS REQUIESCIT IN ORA,
QUONDAM PRÆCLARUS, SED NUNC CINIS ATQUE FAVILLA

This epitaph being written in Latin verse, as the learned can see, we will give an almost literal translation of it, that it may not be lost to our fair readers:

Here lies
one justly celebrated—
the illustrious Cat, Moumouth,
who accuses a hell-born villain called Lustucru,
as the author of his woes.
But Heaven
defeated the black perfidies, which this monster
had prepared to destroy
Moumouth.
The Cat, at length, could enjoy at leisure,
days spun by pleasure,
out of silk and gold.
Stop,
passer by,
and let gently flow
thy tears upon his cold ashes,
upon the icy remains of a charming animal,
who was the love and torment
of Mother Michel.
May he accept our homage!
He was merely a cat,
but his sublime virtues place him on a level with
the most celebrated mortals,
and
in ancient Egypt,
altars would have been erected to his
Memory.



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